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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2436
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5931
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9494
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7121
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4769
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2861
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000092

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMA: U TIN OO, BACK IN THE SADDLE, WELCOMES
U.S. ENGAGEMENT

REF: RANGOON 87

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (C) During a February 16 meeting with recently released National League for Democracy (NLD) Vice-Chair U Tin Oo, the Charge described the U.S. Burma policy review, in which the NLD's views were regularly solicited. U Tin Oo welcomed U.S. engagement efforts, expecting it will be a long-term process.

He told the Charge he is actively participating in NLD activities. He reaffirmed that the party has yet to take a position on the regime's planned 2010 elections. He is optimistic Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) will be released soon. U Tin Oo expressed appreciation for the United States' long-standing support for Burma's democracy movement, including calls for the release of political prisoners. The 82 year old veteran politician appears dedicated and eager to return to active party politics. End summary.

Supportive of Engagement

12. (C) The Charge, Pol/Econ Chief, and U Tin Oo had a cordial forty-five minute meeting at U Tin Oo's residence on February 16. U Tin Oo was released on February 13 from nearly seven years in custody, the last six under house arrest. The CDA welcomed U Tin Oo's freedom, noting that the USG constantly calls on the GOB to release all of Burma's remaining political prisoners. The Charge outlined the new USG approach on Burma, emphasizing that the USG has consulted closely with the NLD throughout. U Tin Oo was clearly aware of the U.S. engagement efforts and responded positively, commenting that he expects it will be a long-term process resulting in gradual progress.

Back at Work

13. (C) U Tin Oo confirmed he returned to his leadership position in the NLD by attending a Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting February 15 and chairing the process to select members of the party's Central Committee from all states and divisions (Reftel). The Central Committee selection process is well under way; only two regions have yet to submit their recommendations. U Tin Oo observed that a current top priority for the CEC is allaying party member concerns, presumably expressed during February 15-16 meetings, that the recent CEC expansion was "all from Rangoon" to the exclusion of outlying states and divisions. (Note: This corroborates at least one recent press account that reports dissatisfaction among party members from Bago Division about the CEC expansion process.)

Too Soon For NLD to Decide Approach to Elections

14. (C) When asked for his views on the planned 2010 elections, U Tin Oo said that, in the absence of electoral legislation, it is too soon for the NLD to decide its position. Although U Tin Oo is aware of the split within the party between those opposed to participation (led by U Win Tin) and those inclined to consider possibilities (led by Khin Maung Swe), he declined to choose sides. He solicited the Charge's views on how the party should approach the elections. The CDA observed that only Burma's people can decide the best course for the country, and only the NLD can judge whether it makes sense to participate in the elections. He added that clearly the NLD faces a difficult decision, with pluses and minuses from all options, so it is no surprise there are divisions within the party. The CDA relayed ASSK's comments, as expressed to Senator Webb and A/S

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Campbell, that it will be important for the NLD to weigh both idealistic and practical considerations in considering how to achieve best outcomes for Burma. The CDA noted reports that U Tin Oo in the past paid particular attention to developing NLD youth and suggested more such attention would be very helpful.

Optimistic about Eventual ASSK Release

15. (C) U Tin Oo is optimistic ASSK will be released soon, noting that in 1995 she was released from detention within months of his own release. He stressed the crucial role ASSK can play in national reconciliation, observing that Burma's ethnic minority groups believe in her support for federalism. The CDA noted the U.S. sees merit in inclusive dialogue among all parties in Burma and encourages it at every opportunity. U Tin Oo lamented Than Shwe's unwillingness to meet directly with ASSK.

Appreciates USG Support for Democracy Movement

16. (C) On international relations, U Tin Oo said Burma should seek a peaceful co-existence with other countries. He noted the reality of Burma's two huge neighbors which make it important to have powerful other friends; but he rebutted government propaganda that NLD leaders are "lackeys" of the West, noting that the party reaches out to all countries that have shown support for the cause of democracy. He was extremely grateful for the long-standing support of the U.S., referring specifically to the Clinton Administration, for Burma's democracy movement and especially for the release of political prisoners, including himself.

Comment: Making Up for Lost Time?

17. (C) U Tin Oo seemed in good health, although he is recovering from recent eye surgery and clearly still has trouble with his vision. He appeared well-versed in current

political developments and told us he regularly listens to VOA and RFA and reads Newsweek. He also commented he has a satellite dish, presumably to watch international television broadcasts.

18. (C) It is too soon to say how the 82 year old Vice Chair's return to the NLD's leadership will affect the party, but we are encouraged that he seems energetic and anxious to tackle party concerns, including how to attract and maintain youth members. He was released Saturday night and was already at work Monday morning. By our Tuesday meeting, he seemed up to speed on current events and focused on the tasks ahead.

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